

## **Ramon Llull's *Llibre de santa Maria*: Theodicy, ontology and initiation**

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### **1. Introduction**

As a work of spiritual education and formation, Ramon Llull's *Llibre de santa Maria* (1290) is outstandingly accomplished. The main body of the text is composed of a dialogue amongst four interlocutors, namely, Praise, Prayer, Intention and a hermit, each of whom performs a distinctive role in the discussion. Each chapter is concerned with a particular principle—usually a moral virtue—and follows a fairly standard pattern. Praise always defines the principle that is under consideration, and praises the Blessed Virgin Mary, describing her with reference to that principle and to points of Catholic doctrine, thereby showing the Blessed Virgin's exceptional status. Intention teaches the importance of the right ordering of intentions, mainly in one's personal life, but also in the life of a community; whilst Prayer prays to Saint Mary for people's conversion to a right manner of living and of praising Christ and his mother. The hermit acts as a foil for the three principal teachers—asking questions and narrating anecdotes as an equal—and facilitates the progress of the dialogue. The most demanding questions in the dialogue are raised by the figure of Prayer, and these centre upon a question of theodicy, which can be briefly described as follows. In every chapter, she points out that there are many people in the world who have no

regard for God or the Blessed Virgin Mary, and who more generally lead unholy lives. It is also established, during the course of the discussion, that Christ will not refuse any request which his mother makes of him, and she could therefore ask him to convert the many people who lead bad lives, so that they will accord proper honour to him and to her. The question, then, is why the Blessed Virgin does not intercede with her son to save wicked people from their error; for the fact that so many people persist in their evil ways shows that she has not done so. This nagging concern is gradually resolved through a process of instruction and transformation of the reader's consciousness, which itself is a process of coming to a deep understanding of the nature of the moral and spiritual universe. The reader is initiated into a realisation of the fundamentally merciful nature of God's relationship to humanity, and the Blessed Virgin is both the image and the agent of that mercy. Moreover, specifically as Mother of God, she effectively constitutes the space in which the initiation can take place.

## 2. The Prologue to the *Llibre de santa Maria*

Llull begins the *Llibre de santa Maria* by explaining that the purpose of the book is twofold: to show people how to speak to others of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and particularly of her various noble qualities,<sup>1</sup> and to explain the manner in which they should praise and pray to her.<sup>2</sup> He also notes that the book presents «in part the art and teaching of the demonstrative, inventive and amative art»,<sup>3</sup> and indeed, the qualities that he has attributed to Our Lady at the outset are taken from the Principles of the Art.<sup>4</sup> The readership that Llull has in mind, however, is a non-specialist one:

Car aquest Libre es de nostra Dona e nostra Dona es regina verge e dona, per açò nos majorment fem aquest Libre a regines verges e dones a honor de nostra Dona.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *LSM*Cat Del Pròlec 1, 3.

<sup>2</sup> *LSM*Cat Del Pròlec 2, 4.

<sup>3</sup> *LSM*Cat Del Pròlec 8, 5.

<sup>4</sup> The qualities that Llull mentions here are «goodnesses, greatnesses, beauties and virtues» (see n. 1, above). For the list of Principles given in Figure A, see *Ars Brevis* in SW 1, 569-644 at 580-581, or <lullinarts.net/ArsGeneralisUltima.html>. Although goodness, greatness and virtue appear in all versions of Figure A, beauty does not. However, the list of Principles is not intended to be exhaustive, and the structure of *LSM* (not to mention considerations of a wider historical and philosophical kind), implies that beauty is entitled to inclusion.

<sup>5</sup> *LSM*Cat Del Pròlec 8, 5. For this reason, I refer to the reader with feminine pronouns throughout this paper. The fact that *LSM* was written primarily for a female audience is one of the reasons for think-

Furthermore, not only does Llull have in mind a female readership, but he constructs the work as a dialogue in which ladies account for three of the four interlocutors. We can also note that the author presumes that his readers are Christian, so that the book's attention is directed to the spiritual welfare of Catholics, and not the conversion of Muslims and Jews.

The Prologue describes the meeting of the four characters. The three ladies encounter one another along the wayside, and are all sorrowful at the godless state of the world: Praise complains that people praise only wordly things, such as houses and fine clothes, whilst Prayer complains that these are the only things they pray for, and Intention bemoans the fact that Catholics give greater importance to their private intentions than to the public good, exemplifying a more general failure to order their lives in accordance with proper priorities. The three ladies then meet the Hermit, who seems to them to be a wise man, and so the four of them settle down in the shade of a beautiful tree, near a clear fountain, to talk of the Blessed Virgin.<sup>6</sup> The remainder of the book is the record of their dialogue.

### 3. The structure and character of the dialogue

The *Llibre* is organised into thirty chapters, which are concerned respectively with thirty Principles (*commençaments*)—a number which, Llull says, was chosen because it corresponds to the thirty pieces of silver for which Our Lord was bought and sold.<sup>7</sup> Many of these Principles correspond to the Principles of the Art, and the others—with one exception<sup>8</sup>—are moral virtues that are closely tied to one or another of the Principles. For instance, the first two chapters are headed «Goodness» and «Greatness», which are always given as the first two of the named Principles, and the third chapter is headed «Perseverance», which corresponds to the third. For the third of the Principles in Figure A is «Eternity», and, as such, is proper only to God. In the created world, on the other hand, the third Principle appears as «Duration», and, as is made clear in Chapter 3 of the *Llibre*, this is manifested as Perseverance in the world of moral action.

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ing that it was written originally in Catalan (Llull 2005, xlv). It seems to have been translated into Latin during the first half of the fourteenth century (Blanca Garí: «Introducción» to Llull 2005, pp. 3-33, at 27).

<sup>6</sup> *LSMCat* 27, 14.

<sup>7</sup> *LSMCat* 2, 4.

<sup>8</sup> This exception is Chapter 30, which is «Dawn». This is in a category of its own, and will be considered below.

Some of the moral qualities considered in the *Llibre* are less evidently tied to a Principle from the Art. But if we bear in mind that the list of nine or sixteen Principles that are used in the Art is not exhaustive, it is never difficult to see the connection between any of these moral qualities and something that must in fact be one of the Principles. For example, Chapter 15 is concerned with Virginity, and virginity is defined as «entegretat de cors e de pensa contra carnal delit».<sup>9</sup> It is hard to see why integrity would be excluded from any complete list of Principles, since it corresponds to others, such as Unity and Justice. Virginity, like perseverance, thus seems to be a moral example of, or participation in, one of the Principles which founds and constitutes the created world. In this work, however, the main emphasis is on the world's moral and spiritual aspects.

From the brief observations that have already been made, it can be seen that right moral action is understood to be action which corresponds to the very order of creation—a view which is not only Biblical, but is found in other religious systems, and perhaps needs to be explicitly stated only to those of us who inhabit the unusual world of modernity. In fact, the quality of moral perseverance can be simply identified with that of physical duration, as in the following example, where it refers both to the bond of love and to the duration of the union between form and matter:

... perseverança d'amor fa durar en sí metexa la bona amor e la gran amor e la poderosa amor que han nostra Dona e son fill, enaxí com en la divinal essencia lo Pare deu e lo Fill se amen en lo Sant Esperit, o en axí com la bona dona e lo bon marit se amen en lo fill que han, lo qual es bo e bell e ha les fayçons de cascún, o en axí com la forma e la materia perseveren ensems en la conjunció que han, e en axí de les altres coses.<sup>10</sup>

Although the word *love* is not used of the bond of union specifically between form and matter, the association of this physical union with the unitive love that exists between divine Persons and that which exists between human beings, is reminiscent of notions from ancient philosophy, where love may be the binding force of the universe.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *LSMCat* 15.1, 113.

<sup>10</sup> *LSMCat* 3.3, 35-36. This is an example of the Principles being «mixed» (since love is good, great and powerful), a state which Llull refers to as «conditioned». Conditioning is central to the practice of the Art, and (or because) it is rooted in the constitution of the cosmos. See Bonner (2008, 155-158).

<sup>11</sup> See also the observations on love between the divine Persons, p. 12. The importance of mixing—or «conditioning» (see previous footnote)—might alert us to the centrality of a specifically unitive force within Llull's conception of the world.



Both love and perseverance, then, are principles which can be applied not only to human action and the physical world, but also to God. Indeed, it is a rule that the Principles of the *Llibre* not only apply to the human and physical worlds, but are also, in their perfect state, attributes of God. The Principles are founded in God, and their universal applicability is a theme that we shall return to later.

Having observed that the chapters of the *Llibre* are headed, and concerned with, qualities which are also Principles from the Art, it must also be said that the term *principle* is not generally used in this work after the opening, explanatory, sections. Rather, Llull uses phrases such as «goodness, greatness, eternity, and the others [*e les altres*]». Moreover, the most frequent reference point for their excellence (alongside Christ, in whom they are perfect) is the Blessed Virgin Mary, in whom that excellence is exceptional, but is created, not infinite.

Each chapter deals with its subject matter according to more or less the same pattern. First, the hermit asks Praise to define the subject under discussion, which she does. The definition is intended to be a determining factor in the chapter's subsequent discussion, and provide the specific knowledge necessary for undertaking the exercises that the reader will encounter later on.<sup>12</sup>

After the definition, Praise expounds and praises the quality under discussion as it occurs in the Blessed Virgin. Typically, this quality is related to her divine motherhood. Let us take the example of *virtue*, to see how this can work.

The definition which Praise gives of virtue is as follows: «virtut es neximent de unitat de bontat granea perseverança e les altres en un bo gran e los altres».<sup>13</sup> She then says that, by using this definition, «vull loar nostra Dona de virtut en .iij. maneres, ço es a saber, en virtut de Jesu Christ e en virtut natural e en virtut moral».<sup>14</sup> The Blessed Virgin's connection to these three virtues is then described, one by one. The following is the account of her relationship to the virtue of Jesus Christ. I quote it in full, because it serves to illustrate several points.

En Jesu Christ fill de nostra Dona ha .ij.<sup>es</sup> virtuts, ço es saber, virtut divina e virtut humana. Aquestes dues virtuts nasqueren de la unitat de bonea granea perseverança de nostra Dona en un bo e gran e perseverant, ço es saber, nostre Senyor Jesu Christ qui es ver Deu e ver home. Aquesta virtut qui nasc de la bontat e granea e per-

<sup>12</sup> *LSMCat* Del Pròlec 2, 4.

<sup>13</sup> *LSMCat* 7.1, 61. «Virtus est origo unionis bonitatis, magnitudinis, persuerantiae etc., in uno bono, magno, etc.» (*LSMCat* VII, 5-6, 101). The Latin *origo* for *neximent* detracts from the anticipation of specifically Marian-maternal virtue that is to follow.

<sup>14</sup> *LSMCat* 7.1, 61.

severança de nostra Dona e qui es virtut de Deu home, nasc ab virtut de Deu qui naxent se vestí virtut humana, la qual virtut humana nasc de nostra Dona, ço es saber, que virtut nasqué de virtut, ço es humana virtut de Jesu Christ nasqué de la virtut de nostra Dona, e sí s feu de la bontat e les altres de nostra Dona; e per açò la divina bontat e granea e eternitat foren vestides de la virtut humana qui nasqué de nostra Dona, e en axí, que bontat granea e eternitat qui son virtuts infinides e son una mateixa virtut, se vestiren virtut humana finida nada de finida virtut. On, en aytant com es lo vestiment que la divina virtut fa de humana virtut e aquella humana virtut es nada de nostra Dona, es la virtut de nostra Dona digna de esser loada en bontat granea e eternitat qui son infinida virtut vestida d aquella virtut nada de nostra Dona; e per açò cové que la virtut de nostra Dona d on covenc néxer tan bona e tan gran et tan perseverant virtut que vestís infinida virtut e infinida bontat e les altres, conservàs en nostra Dona virtut de virginitat, de santedat puritat e unitat, de bontat granea e perseverança; car si la virtut de nostra Dona la qual havia ans del concebiment, se corrupés e no conservàs en nostra Dona virginitat, ja no abastara que n nasqués virtut que pogués vestir infinida virtut en bontat e en les altres, e en axí no pogra néxer home qui fos Deu. On, com la virtut de nostra Dona covenc esser tan noble e tan alta que abastà a néxer d ella home Deu, qual es qui pogués loar complidament la virtut de nostra Dona?<sup>15</sup>

There are several points here which are worthy of note. Firstly, the Incarnation and divine motherhood occur in part because there is, as it were, a natural affinity between the Blessed Virgin and God. The fact that the created virtues of «goodness, greatness, perseverance, and the others» exist in her enables the infinite virtue of God—which is his own goodness, greatness, eternity, etc.—to clothe itself in her human virtue, whilst any imperfection in her virtue would render this clothing impossible. But something more than ordinary human virtue is necessary for the mother of God incarnate, namely, perpetual virginity:

for if the virtue which Our Lady had before she conceived, was corrupted, and if virginity was not preserved in Our Lady, then it would not have come about that a virtue was born of her which infinite virtue was able to clothe in goodness and in the others, and thus it would not be possible for the man who was God to be born.

A similar line of argument is advanced in Chapter 15, on Virginity, where Llull writes: «nostra Dona covenc esser verge ans del part e après del part».<sup>16</sup> So ordinary human virtue is not sufficient for the woman who is to bear the man who is God; she has a virtue which exceeds the normal human condition, namely, virginity that is preserved both before and after childbirth. These passages

<sup>15</sup> *LSMCat* 7.2, 61-62.

<sup>16</sup> *LSMCat* 15.3, 114.

are consonant with others in the *Llibre*, where Llull describes the Blessed Virgin as being raised above the ordinary human condition by an enhancement of the noble Principles, in order to be able to bear God incarnate. (Examples from the chapters on Goodness, Power and Grace are given below.)<sup>17</sup>

Secondly, the repetition of lists of noble qualities—in this instance, both Our Lady's own and those of God—serves to reinforce in the reader's mind the sense of the unity in which these Principles co-exist. Although Llull does not teach a doctrine of creation by emanation, the being of creation—specifically, in the Principles—shares something of the character of the being of its maker.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, if it were not for this likeness between God and creation, Mary could not be elevated above the normal human condition in such a way that she could become the bearer of God incarnate.

And thirdly, the definition of «virtue» seems to be modelled on the subsequent account of the Incarnation, and not the other way around. The birth, or the arising, of virtues in a single virtue seems to take its pattern from the birth of the divine and human virtues in the one Christ. At any rate, it is hard to see exactly what the definition might mean unless one had read Praise's explanation of the virtue of Jesus Christ. It is God's own activity which constitutes the pattern for the activity of creatures.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The theme is taken up by Nicholas of Cusa, who considers that it is necessary for Mary to remain a virgin during and after childbirth because she would otherwise not have had that fullness of perfection, namely, «fullness of fertility», that is proper to the one who gives birth to the eternal Son. In this connection, Nicholas also describes «the most glorious Virgin Mary» as *superbenedicta*. (de Cusa 1977 III, 212-213, 36-38).

<sup>18</sup> Copleston gives a helpful presentation of the thirteenth-century discussion concerning whether the term *being* is used of God and creation in a manner that is univocal or equivocal (Copleston 1962, II.2, 224-230). The view which became the dominant one in Catholic theology was that of Aquinas, who argued that we use the term *being* equivocally—that is to say, the term *being* means something different when it is applied to a creature from when it is applied to God. This view was not by any means universally favoured by Aquinas's contemporaries, and Bonner and Ruiz-Simon have pointed out that Llull evidently takes the view that the term *being* is applied to God and creation in a manner that is univocal. Bonner has helpfully drawn attention to the fact that, in the later versions of the *Art* (after 1289), Llull uses the term *Principles* to refer both to the divine Dignities and to the Principles as they exist in creation. He cites correspondence with Ruiz Simon, in which the latter points out that this usage shows clearly that the being of God, as being, is the same sort of activity as the being of the created world—which is to say that we use the term *being* univocally of God and creation (Bonner 2008, 136, and n. 40).

<sup>19</sup> The application of Llull's doctrine of the correlatives to the Blessed Trinity makes it absolutely clear that the being of God, as being, is the same sort of thing as the being of creation. Conversely, the three-fold being of creation derives its character from that of its Trinitarian maker. See Lohr (1988, 541-543) and Domínguez (2001, 284-285).

All these points will be taken up below. For the time being, we can note that Praise's speech in praise of Our Lady's virtue is in several respects representative of her opening address in every chapter. After Praise's speech, which sometimes includes illustrative tales, the hermit always poses a puzzle. This is a short story in which there is doubt as to which course of action is better in the given circumstances, or which noble virtue is to be preferred to some other. No solution is provided to these puzzles, because the reader is supposed to go away and discuss them with her friends and relations.<sup>20</sup> The principles for solving them, however, are those which the reader should be learning as she works her way through the *Llibre*. Here is the example from the chapter on wisdom:

... dir vos he què s'esdevenç entre dues dones. La una d'aquelles dues dones era molt savia e l'altra era molt bella. Aquella dona qui era savia loava nostra Dona de sa saviesa, e l'altra la loava de beutat. E d'açò era qüestió entre les dues dones; car aquella qui era savia deya que nostra Dona es més savia que bella en quant ab la saviea sab Deu, emperò ab sa beutat no embelleix Deu; l'altra qui era bella deya que nostra Dona es més bella que savia en quant sa beutat embelleix totes les altres beutats qui son en los sants de gloria, e la saviea de nostra Dona aquelles beutats no embelleïa; encara, que ja la saviea de nostra Dona no poria saber Deu sens que no reebés beutat de l'esperital beutat de nostra Dona, car no seria digna si bella no era. D'on, per raó d'aquest contrast fo feta qüestió si aquelles dues dones loaven o blasmaven nostra Dona.<sup>21</sup>

In order to consider this conundrum, one should take account of the relevant definitions. Wisdom is «the property by reason of which the wise man understands»;<sup>22</sup> whilst beauty is «that thing which gives joy to [the acts of] seeing, hearing, imagining and remembering, understanding and loving».<sup>23</sup> This is significant, because it makes clear that beauty is a property which belongs to the soul, and not just the body.<sup>24</sup> The *Llibre* constantly illustrates the fact that the various noble qualities are intrinsically equal to one another, and, as we have seen, they exist in an unusually excellent degree in the Blessed Virgin, so there is never an implication that, in her, any one principle is inferior to any other. In fact, beauty

<sup>20</sup> *LSMCat* Del Pròlec 4, 4.

<sup>21</sup> *LSMCat* 5.5, 51.

<sup>22</sup> *LSMCat* 5.1, 48.

<sup>23</sup> *LSMCat* 14.1, 107.

<sup>24</sup> The chapter on Beauty appears later in the book, so the reader may not have read it when she thinks about this particular question. It may be for this reason that one of the protagonists discourses here on beauty of a specifically spiritual kind, since otherwise there may be a tendency to think of beauty in purely physical terms, and thus judge it to be inferior to the spiritual quality of wisdom.



and wisdom are both Principles which the *Llibre* expressly attributes to the Mother of God in their respective eponymous chapters. I suggest, therefore, that the correct solution to the hermit's question is that these ladies are not praising, but are condemning, Our Lady, since each is suggesting that one of the noble Principles is deficient in her.

After the hermit's first question, or puzzle, Intention offers an instructive tale. This is the one she gives in Chapter Six, on Power:

... una dona loava nostra Dona e comparava la a flor blanca e vermella a significança que nostra Dona havía color blanca e vermella; e encara, que blanca color significa nedeetat e puritat de coratge vestit de santedat, e color vermella significa amor e fervor de coratge. Dementre que aquesta dona loava per esta manera nostra Dona, vejarès li fo que no la loava complidament segons la semblança de flor e de color, e consirà que la flor es per entenció del fruyt, com sia la flor per la segona entenció e lo fruyt per la primera. On, com la dona hac aquesta consideració, apercebé que nostra Dona era comparada a flor blanca e vermella, e son fill a fruyt home Deu nat de aquella flor que es nostra Dona. D on, adoncs la bona dona se tenc per contenta com havía comparada nostra Dona a flor; emperò marvellà s per qual natura havía major poder de loar nostra Dona en lo fruit que en la flor, com lo fruit no sia nostra Dona; mas quant consirà que lo fruit és per la primera entenció e la flor per la segona, conec que per la primera entenció ha hom més de poder e de virtut en loar nostra Dona, que per la segona.<sup>25</sup>

The conclusion of this instructive example is not, by any reckoning, a surprising one. Sometimes, however, the application of the order of first and second intentions can give rise to less predictable conclusions. In Chapter 5, concerning Wisdom, Intention tells a story (surely drawn from life!) of a religious who was preaching on the occasion of the feast of the Holy Trinity.<sup>26</sup> The preacher said that the Holy Trinity was too subtle a subject for anyone to understand or preach about, and so he spoke of other matters instead. Intention was outraged at this, because the Feast of the Holy Trinity, in virtue of its object, is the «highest and noblest» of the year. She protests about the fact that people give greater honour to the feasts of Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and St. John (presumably the Baptist) than they do to that of the Holy Trinity, even though the latter feast is more worthy than the others; for the feast of the Trinity is ordained through the first intention, and all others through the second.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *LSMCat* 4,6, 45.

<sup>26</sup> This is described as a festival of four days, and thus obviously includes more than Trinity Sunday.

<sup>27</sup> *LSMCat* 5,6, 51.

Since Christmas, Easter and Pentecost have historically been the three greatest feasts of the Church's year, and had been recognised as such in official liturgical practice since long before the time of Llull, this outburst in favour of the primacy of the feast of the Trinity may feel like an attack on something more than popular custom, and it shows the consistency with which Llull applies the rule that things should be accorded their worth in accordance with their place in the order of being.

After Intention has told a story to illustrate primary and secondary intentions, Prayer then begins to appeal to the Blessed Virgin—and, indeed, to remonstrate with her—on matters relating to the Principle under consideration. Typically, she bemoans the fact that most people in the world do not order their lives according to right intention, and have no regard for spiritual matters. She also beseeches the Queen of Heaven to ask her son to enlighten and convert all those who are misguided in this way. We shall consider Prayer's supplications more thoroughly below.

After Prayer's protests and petitions, the hermit offers another brain-teaser (partly, it seems, in order to calm things down), and then Intention narrates a further instructive anecdote, exemplifying the importance of ordering one's intentions according to their proper priority.

#### 4. The Principles in the Blessed Virgin Mary

Understanding Llull's work is always a matter of understanding his ontology, and this is expounded in a clear and non-technical way in the *Llibre de santa Maria*.

The character of God's being is articulated briefly in Chapter 9, on Glory, where Praise defines glory as «the delight in which goodness, greatness, perseverance and the others take their rest and enjoyment».<sup>28</sup> Praise then considers Our Lady's glory according to her goodness, greatness and love. This choice of topics both illustrates the unity of the Principles and conforms to the *Llibre's* favoured pattern of praising the Blessed Virgin in a threefold manner. The preference for working in three's, of course, is based on the primacy of the Blessed Trinity, and God's trinitarian identity is elegantly described in this chapter, being presented as a matter which the Blessed Virgin understands and delights in: «[...]Our Lady has the wisdom by which she understands [*entén*] one deity, one essence, one divine nature, one God; and in this deity she understands one

<sup>28</sup> *LSMCat* 9,1, 75.

Father, one Son, one Holy Spirit, who are one God and are one deity, one essence, one nature»;<sup>29</sup> «the great delight which Our Lady has in understanding this [...] is the greatest glory and blessing that can be».<sup>30</sup>

It is hard to do justice to this account of the Trinity without quoting the whole of the rather long passage, but here is an edited version:

Lo Pare engendra lo Fill de sí meteix entenent sí meteix esser deu, car en açò que entén si meteix esser deu bo infinit eternal e les altres, covén que son entendre sia obra d on se segueasca obrat deu e produyt del Pare, de tota la essència e la natura del Pare per ço que la obra sia aytant gran com la essència e la unitat de Deu, e per ço que la unitat de Deu no sia ociosa e que en Deu bontat granea eternitat hi hajen obra e que ocioses no sien; e car Deu no pot multiplicar sí meteix pus que ja es bo infinit eternal e les altres, produu de sí meteix altre qui es deu Fill e ell romàn deu Pare.<sup>31</sup>

God the Son is like God the Father and is equal to him in goodness, infinity, eternity, etc., and God the Father loves the Son since he is of the same worth as himself [*val com ell meteix*]. The Son, likewise, loves the Father as himself, and the love which each bears the other must be as great as each in goodness, infinity, eternity, etc. And, since God cannot be multiplied, the love which the Father and the Son produce must be nothing other than themselves, and this love is the Holy Spirit. Yet all three remain one God. The generation of the Son takes place in eternity, and, although the three Persons are one God, the distinction between them is maintained. It is only the maintenance of this distinction which enables the dynamic work of giving love, returning love, and the act of loving itself; and if this were not the case, there would be a privation of work within the divine essence, and «God in himself would be otiose with regard to goodness, greatness, eternity, power, wisdom, love and the others, which is impossible».<sup>32</sup>

The notion that the Holy Spirit is the love who binds the Father to the Son is probably taken most directly from St. Augustine, but we have already seen that Llull regards love as a binding force in the created world as well, and that this idea has a long history.

This exposition of the relations between the Persons of the Trinity shows the foundation of the world's unity, and also of its variety— a subject much discussed by scholars of all the monotheistic faiths in the thirteenth century. However, unlike most scholastic authors of his period, Llull typically takes principles

<sup>29</sup> *LSMCat* 9,3, 76.

<sup>30</sup> *LSMCat* 9,3, 77.

<sup>31</sup> *LSMCat* 9,3, 76.

<sup>32</sup> *LSMCat* 9,3, 76-77.

that were generally accepted with regard to human knowledge of God, and transfers them to knowledge of the created world.<sup>33</sup> For example, all philosophers and theologians accepted that the essence of God, which is identical with his existence, was unknowable. For Llull, the essence of a creature—what it is in itself—is similarly unknowable.<sup>34</sup> Again, all philosophers and theologians accepted that God could not be defined in terms of anything else, that is, in terms of anything other than God;<sup>35</sup> but Llull—famously—holds that this also is true of creatures, so that anything that exists can be properly defined only in terms of the distinctive action which constitutes its existence. In practice, the attribute which decisively distinguishes God from creation is that of infinity, that is to say, the boundlessness which characterises everything that is true of God and nothing within creation.

All things proceed from God, and in some measure share in the likeness of their omnipresent Creator. This likeness consists in the Principles, which exist infinitely in the Deity, and in a limited manner in creation, and the Blessed Virgin Mary furnishes the most perfect example of this created likeness. Mary's place in the created order, then, and her relationship to the Principles, can be articulated as follows.

All being is a unity, although there is an important distinction between the being of God and the being of creation. The unity of being exists in the Principles; and in God, who is infinite and perfectly simple, the Principles and their unity are infinite. The being of creation is also a unity, but a contracted one.<sup>36</sup> This created unity exists entirely in the Principles, but in creatures, their operation is diverse. As Llull says in an earlier work,

... en Déu les virtuts no han nulla diferència les unes ab les altres; mas car les obres que han en les creatures són diverses, per aço paren diverses, enaixí com par la

<sup>33</sup> This is surely the underlying structure of the argument for the correlatives. See fn. 18.

<sup>34</sup> Domínguez (2001, 286), apparently quoting from the *Liber investigatione actuum divinarum rationum*.

<sup>35</sup> For examples and a discussion of Llull's own attempts to provide definitions of God, see Bonner (2008, 161, 245-250).

<sup>36</sup> Llull writes: «Contracció es ajustament de alguna cosa de altra, axí com bondat ajustada a home, per ço que hom sia bo e just» (cited in Bonner & Ripoll (2002, 135)), and the term is used frequently by Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464), a great student of Llull's work. It is also used by Domínguez in his discussion of Llull's Mariology, where he makes the important observation that the world created by God tends of necessity towards its own perfection, and that this is similarly true of each species. Thus, fire, for example, can augment its perfection by contracting itself in an ever-increasing number of bodies (Domínguez 2001, 288).



vista diversa com guarda en dos miralls, e la un és tort e l'altre és dret, e la vista és una en cascú mirall, sens nulla diferència.<sup>37</sup>

In the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is the noblest of created beings, the reflection is as straight as is possible for a creature, that is to say, for a being who is not infinite, and, as we have seen, this created perfection is necessary for her to be the mother of God incarnate. This is implied in the frequent repetition and combining of principles in the various accounts of Mary's excellence. And it means that what is true of created beings as such is true also of the Blessed Virgin Mary: she corresponds to the created order in the state of its own perfection, and, as Mother of God, she represents that order, both in her acceptance of the Incarnation on the world's behalf, and in her prayers for its well-being.<sup>38</sup>

## 5. Prayer's complaint

From what has gone above, it can be seen that the *Llibre*'s central question about the existence of human evil, and the apparent absence of any countervailing action by the Blessed Virgin, is really a concern about the disruption and maintenance of the proper order of the cosmos. Let us now examine this concern.

In every chapter of the *Llibre*, Prayer appeals to the Queen of Heaven for the conversion of those many people who fail to do honour to God and Our Lady, and who, more generally, fail to order their intentions properly, according to their true worth. The Blessed Virgin has the power to bring about this conversion, because she is the Mother of God incarnate. In Chapter 4, on Power, this is explained by Praise in the following way:

Nostra Dona es mare de Deu home. En aquest Deu e home qui es fill de nostra Dona ha .ij. poders, poder divinal e poder humanal. Al poder de nostra Dona ha donat lo divinal poder tanta de bontat tanta de granea tanta de perseverança, que pot nostra Dona per son poder esser mare de Deu home, e pot Deu home donar gran bontat veritat e compliment a justs e a peccadors qui a nostra Dona se clamen e qui d ella misericordia e gracia esperen. On, com açò sia en axí, doncs, qui poría consirar com gran poder ha nostra Dona qui pot esser mare e es mare de Deu home, e qui pot fer e donar a justs e a peccadors tot ço que li vé a plaer de Deu home?<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Blanquerna, Cap. CII, *OE* I, 281.

<sup>38</sup> Elsewhere, I have argued that a representative function of precisely this kind is at least implicit in almost all Christian doctrine and devotion regarding the Virgin Mary. See Boss (2000).

<sup>39</sup> *LSMCat* 4.2, 43.

This passage does not make clear exactly how it is that the Incarnation makes Our Lady's intercession effective, but it seems as if the gifts which the divine power has bestowed upon Our Lady's human power, in order that she can be the Mother of God incarnate, have opened up a channel by which humanity's petitions for grace and mercy can be passed to God in the certainty that they will be heard. The union between, on the one hand, the human being who has been raised by God to a uniquely high level, and, on the other, the Son of God who has entered her and thus joined himself to humanity, is a union which transforms the underlying ontological bond between God and creation. God has made of Our Lady a golden link between himself and the world. And it is by entering the world through this link that God is bringing all things to perfection—that he gives «goodness, truth and fulfilment to the just and to sinners». So we can be confident that the prayers of the Mother of God will indeed be received, and this is the basis on which Prayer cries out to her.

Prayer's petition to Our Lady takes its most dramatic form in Chapter 1, on Goodness. Here, Prayer states that there are people who blaspheme the Blessed Virgin, and who deny that she is good, or that she is the Mother of God, whilst there are others who receive benefits from her and yet do not love and honour her as they ought. Prayer then continues—rather surprisingly, one might think—with an accusation against the Queen of Heaven:

Per que us dic, regina, que par que vos no amets vostra bontat meteixa ni la honor que li cové, car si ho feyets, pergaríets vostre fill que us faés amar e conèxer vostra bontat a totes gents; e ja d'açò vostre fill, pus que vos ho volguéssets, no us en diría de no ni fer no ho poría; e si hu feya, bé us dic que ja en vos ni ell fe ni esperança no hauría un dia de ma vida.<sup>40</sup>

Prayer then becomes distraught, crying and tearing her hair. Praise, however, chides Prayer for her accusation, saying that she is talking like a mad woman (*folla*). Praise says that people exist in a condition that is evil, and for this reason, they cannot receive the goodness which Our Lady would otherwise give them. She draws an analogy with the sun shining on a blind man whose eyes cannot receive its light. To this suggestion, Prayer's response is one of extreme, not to say hysterical, anger. She says that, if she sounds crazy, this is because she is so sorrowful at the dishonour that is being done to Our Lady's goodness, and that this would not happen if Our Lady were to pray to her son that she be held in greater honour. Prayer also rejects the analogy of the sun and the blind

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<sup>40</sup> *LSMCat* 1,11, 21.

man, saying that the people who despise Our Lady have eyes with which they could see, if only they would open them.

The row between Praise and Prayer is apparently set to continue, but the hermit intervenes to change the subject. Yet throughout the *Llibre*, Prayer continues her complaint about Our Lady's failure to intercede sufficiently with her son. In Chapter 10, on Grace, she addresses the Blessed Virgin as follows:

A vos, regina, es feta gràcia de communa utilitat, segons que ha dit Lausor, e d'aquesta communa utilitat dats gracia, dons e perdons a alguns e no a altres. On, d'on vos vé e per qual natura que vos a uns e a altres no fets gracia e dons e perdons pus que sots eleta a pública utilitat, e pus que en vos ha tanta de bontat, granea e les altres, que a tots podets donar e perdonar? per que no fets moure tots los peccadors a amar e honrar vos meteixa e vostre fill? Sapiats, reyna, que no som pagada ni alegre, ans ne som trista e dolenta, com a tots no perdonats e tots en gràcia no metets; e tem me que jo haja la vostra gracia, pus que no m donats totes aquelles coses que us demàn. Regina! Fets bé, trametets gracia a alguns homens qui vagen per lo mon tractant pública utilitat, e aquests que hagen tanta gracia en lurs paraules e en lurs obres, que moguen les gents a vera entenció en vos e vostre fill amar e pregar e entendre, que adoncs reeben de vos e de vostre fill gracia. Mas que vos no trametats homens per tot lo mon qui tracten comuna utilitat e sien los evangelis preicats e tuyt sien en una ley, ni les gents no s mouen a haver via de demanar comuna utilitat e que enaxí tot lo mon vage a mal, açò, reyna, ni fa a vos a sofferir ni natura ni raó no ho pot més sostenir.<sup>41</sup>

Prayer's repeated demands that Our Lady should ask her son to enlighten and convert those who fail to honour her, and who pervert right intention, have a disturbing effect on the reader. The demand seems to be a just one, yet Prayer receives no answer to her complaint, and it is left unfulfilled at the end of every chapter until the last.

Prayer also protests against anyone being subject to damnation and eternal punishment, partly on the grounds that human beings are not important enough to merit such a harsh sentence, and partly because the act of damnation brings no honour to Christ and Our Lady:

Regina! Poría per neguna manera tant fer ne dir que pogués saber què s en millora vostre fill ni en que exalça-la vostra granea en leixar tanta gent anar a dampnació e pena? ne quin esforç fa vostre fill en turmentar e punir tan petites coses com son homens qui son vermixels e coses passibles e mortals? Encara, si calfa dir que homens fossen grans coses e que molt poguessen contrastar al vostre fill e la vostra granea e santetat, no me n daría maravel·la si vostre fill grans penes lur donava.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> *LSMCat* 10,9, 85-86.

<sup>42</sup> *LSMCat* 2,19, 31-32.

Prayer evidently sees no reason why all people should not be saved, and Our Lady has the power to accomplish this. Why, then, does she not give any answer to the petitions of someone such as Prayer, who seeks the common good with right intention?

The intensity with which Prayer's complaint is repeated serves to highlight the fact that the continuation of human sinfulness is radically at odds with the very structure of the cosmos. It will by now be clear that Llull's vision of proper order is a strongly hierarchical one. By *hierarchical*, I do not mean merely that things follow a descending pattern of importance or authority, but that this order is established by God and permeated with sacred intention. Actions are judged according to the ends to which they are directed, and those ends are ranked according to their intrinsic worth. However, the most important point about this hierarchy is that it is a unity. Indeed, it is an instinct and desire for perfect unity which, above all things, inspire and pervade Llull's work. The only perfect unity is God; but creation has its being from God and shares aspects of that being with God, and creation is itself a unity—a universe. As Andrew Louth writes of Pseudo-Dionysius's *Celestial Hierarchy*: «hierarchies are not mainly about rank, order, subordination..., they are about reaching out into multiplicity and drawing everything back into union with, and assimilation to, the simplicity and beauty of God».<sup>43</sup> So, although the unity of creation is guaranteed by the presence of God throughout, and although he can be encountered at every point in it,<sup>44</sup> the hierarchical order of being means that, in order to come to know, love and serve God perfectly, the human person must observe that order in his or her every action. Right intention accords with the order of being, and it is by following right intention that one comes ever closer to God, who is the end for which the world was made. Hence, any breach of unity, or disruption of the proper order of things, is intolerable and must be overcome or—to borrow a term from Hegel—sublated. This is what underlies the force of Prayer's passionate appeals to the Queen of Heaven, a force which makes one almost dread reading these appeals as the chapters progress. For a state of affairs in which very many people's actions are directed to harmful ends, rather than to God, and in which the

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<sup>43</sup> Louth (2010). Llull's student, Thomas le Myésier, gives a very straight, «Neoplatonic» account of procession and return, in his introduction to the *Art* (le Myésier 1990, 51-67, English translation on [lullianarts.net/brev/golden/goldfig.htm](http://lullianarts.net/brev/golden/goldfig.htm)). The motif of procession and return through a hierarchical order characterises this whole tradition, and Llull refers to the *Celestial Hierarchy* in his work on the quadrature and triangulation of the circle (Lulle 1989, 82).

<sup>44</sup> In the *Book of Contemplation in God*, Llull says that God is in being, i.e., in being as such, or the being of all things (Llull, *OE* II, p. 108), and the *Art* is, amongst other things, a working out of this insight.



Mother of God allows such a widespread state of sin to continue, is an unbearable affront to the harmony of an ordered universe whose origins and destiny are nothing other than the one God.

Eventually, however, a solution to Prayer's questions will be given to the careful reader, if she will allow the *Llibre* to do its work on her.

## 6. Justice and mercy

In order to start to see how Prayer's complaint is addressed, it is helpful to consider the relationship between justice and mercy, because these will turn out to be the principles by which a resolution is found. Both justice and mercy are among the principles of the *Llibre*, and both are therefore found fully in the Blessed Virgin Mary. Justice is defined as the act of granting to each person or thing, that which is due to him, her, or it [*donar a cascú ço que li cové*].<sup>45</sup> Like all the Principles of the Art, it exists in the physical, as well as the spiritual, world. Mercy, in turn, is defined as the pardoning of guilt and sin, and the giving of good and profitable things [*perdonar colpes e peccats e donar coses bones e profitoses*].<sup>46</sup> These two principles are evidently considered to be held to by all people of learning and good sense, and to be principles which are fundamental to right action, since they can serve as criteria by which to judge between different religious traditions:

Oració! dix l'ermità: Un crestià e un sarraí se desputaven davant un filosof. Cascú d'aquests tres eren homens letrats e havíen gran sciencia. Lo crestià deya que la sua ley era mellor que la del sarraí e lo sarraí deya lo contrari; e lo filosof los feu qüestió e demanà ls segons qual de les .ij. leys se podíen la justícia e la misericòrdia de Deu més estendre a obrar e a usar de lur offici. Ni vos, Oració, per qual d'ambdues les leys havets més d'abundancia en pregar?<sup>47</sup>

The fact that justice and mercy are immediately linked to one another in the hermit's question, gives the clue to understanding the proper relationship between them. That relationship is stated more explicitly in a narrative told by Praise in Chapter 13, on Mercy:

Era un peccador, dix Lausor, qui era molt gran peccador, en axí que en aquella ciutat on estava no havia home més mundà que ell era, car de tot en tot s'era girat a

<sup>45</sup> *LSMCat* 12,1, 92.

<sup>46</sup> *LSMCat* 13,1, 99.

<sup>47</sup> *LSMCat* 12,10, 98.

les vanitats d'aquest mon, e Deu e nostra Dona havía gitat en oblit. Un jorn s'esdevenc que aquest home consirà en los peccats e en los falliments que faya e havía fets contra Deu e nostra Dona, e sentí s tant peccador que no hac audacia ni virtut de demanar misericordia ni perdó a Déu ni a nostra Dona, e en sí meteix consirà que era perdut e jutjat a sofferir infinits treballs. Emperò en quant axí consirava jutjà sí meteix a tota justícia, que ha gran amistat ab misericordia, e la justícia tocà la misericordia, e adoncs la misericordia de nostra Dona tocà bontat granea e les altres, e totes ensems corregueren al peccador, al qual donaren contricció e penediment e amor ab la qual amà misericordia e perdó e do, e en axí venc la audacia e demanà perdó e do a nostra Dona; per que la misericordia de nostra Dona donà e perdonà e en via mès lo peccador de demanar misericordia, e d'aquí avant aquell peccador fo home just e de sancta vida, e aytant com visc desirà honor e honrament de nostra Dona. Per que d'aquesta cosa e de moltes d altres, dix Lausor, fa a loar nostra Dona sots raó de misericòrdia.<sup>48</sup>

The hope for mercy, then, comes from recognising that there is an affinity—a «friendship»—between justice and mercy, and, indeed, between justice and all the other Principles of the *Llibre*. Where justice is present, mercy cannot be far behind.

So how are we to understand the nature of the affinity between justice and mercy? Well, let us recall Prayer's objection to anyone's being condemned to eternal damnation. She contended that human beings are too small and insignificant for it to be worth Christ's subjecting them to everlasting punishment, and she said that such punishment did not bring honour to him or to Our Lady. In other words, perpetual torment does not meet the requirement specifically of justice—that is, that beings be given their proper due—since it bestows too much punishment upon the sinner, and does a dishonour to those to whom honour is most greatly owed, that is, to Christ and Our Lady. This means that the exercise of mercy—the pardoning of sins—is itself a function of justice. The just distribution of punishment to weak human beings, and the proper attribution of honour to Christ and his Blessed Mother: both these require the forgiveness of sins, that is, the granting of mercy. According to Lull, justice and mercy are principles on which the universe is founded, and they must therefore embrace one another in the very order of being.

The Blessed Virgin Mary, however, has a rather special relationship to the principle of mercy. She is the mother of mercy in virtue of giving birth to the son who is himself mercy, and she is the daughter of mercy in virtue of being the daughter of God the Father:

<sup>48</sup> *LSMCat* 13,5, 101-102.

On, com ella sia mare e filla de misericordia, ha tanta de semblança de la misericordia de Deu segons maternitat e filiació, que la misericordia de Deu no la pot més a sí meteixa assemblar, car no la pot fer major mare ni millor filla com l à feta, e per ço no la pot més vestir ni ornar de misericordia com l à vestida e ornada.<sup>49</sup>

This says, in effect, that the Mother of God is the created image of God's mercy. She is the daughter and mother of divine mercy, and, as we have already seen, is the link which enables humanity to seek out that mercy. So, on the one hand, when we look at the Blessed Virgin as our intercessor, we see what the mercy of God might look like in created form. But there is something more fundamental than this; for she herself, being clothed and adorned with God's mercy, is a recipient of God's grace even before she seeks it out on behalf of others, and she thus shows the penitent sinner the glory which God desires to bestow upon everyone, the just and the sinful («justs e peccadors») alike.

In Chapter 10, on Grace, grace is defined as «the election of a person above their merit, and the giving of great, good things to those who have not deserved them».<sup>50</sup> Praise goes on to explain that Our Lady is the recipient of enormous grace, since her own merits and goodness could not possibly have been sufficient to make her worthy to be the mother of God incarnate. Her son is vastly greater than she, which means that she could not have merited the honour of being his mother; so her motherhood, together with the goodness, greatness, etc., which she possesses in such an excellent degree, are hers only in virtue of the grace of God.<sup>51</sup> It is God who has fitted her for her unique office, as the noblest being in creation.

The Blessed Virgin, then, is the image and agent of God's mercy, but, before that, she is its recipient. She has not needed to have any sins forgiven, but only because the grace of God has ensured that, in her, no sin is possible.<sup>52</sup> Like creation itself, she is the perfection of God's handiwork.

## 7. *Quae est ista?*<sup>53</sup>

We have now seen that the *Llibre* makes it absolutely clear that there is no reason for anyone to be ultimately fearful of God's punishment. God's justice is

<sup>49</sup> *LSMCat* 13,4, 100-101.

<sup>50</sup> *LSMCat* 10,1, 81.

<sup>51</sup> *LSMCat* 10,2, 81-82.

<sup>52</sup> *LSMCat* 3,4, 36; 4,3, 44.

<sup>53</sup> Chapter 30, «De alba», might usefully be compared with the «Llibre d'Amic e d'Amat» 26: «Cantaven los aucells l'alba, e despertà's l'amic, qui és l'alba, e los aucells feniren lur cant, e l'amic morí per

inseparable from God's mercy, and the prayers of the Blessed Virgin will never be refused if she appeals for the salvation of the penitent sinner. From the point of view of Prayer, however, a difficulty remains, namely, that sinners are not repenting. It seems as if Our Lady is not asking her son to bring about their penitence, and Prayer continues to demand an answer to the question of why the godless are allowed to continue in their godlessness. The answer to this comes about through studying the *Llibre* in the way in which the author asks you to, with the final realisation coming in the last chapter, on Dawn.

The *Llibre's* pedagogical techniques are extremely effective. Rather than a single topic being expounded in detail before moving on to the next subject for consideration, each topic is addressed briefly in every chapter (or in many of them). The Principles, and the relationship between them, are described throughout the work; the place of the Blessed Virgin in the world's creation and restoration is treated similarly; and teachings on the Incarnation and Trinity are interwoven with these. Thus, the subject matter is addressed, with a limited amount of development and small variations in content, throughout twenty-nine chapters which, as we have seen, are all similarly structured. The effect of this is rather like that of a work shanty or ritual chant. The repetitive form draws the reader into the work, and its content is imparted not only intellectually, but also «intuitively». Thus, the reader does not just acquire knowledge, or arguments, but is changed at a deeper level: she gradually sees the world differently. This process is enhanced by the liberal use of anecdotes and topics for discussion. For the reader who finds abstract thinking difficult, these provide another means of learning the *Llibre's* lessons. And even for those who are happy with discussion of the Principles and theological doctrines, the anecdotes and questions supply variation which maintains the reader's engagement, whilst their homely—and often entertaining—character helps to seal the teachings in the mind.

The transformation of the reader's consciousness culminates in Chapter 30, whose principle, the Dawn, is, amongst other things, a state of spiritual enlightenment. To understand what is going on here, let us look at a passage which

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*l' Amat en l'alba.*» Here, the Lover—the human soul—is identified with the Dawn, but then dies in the Dawn for the sake of the Beloved. The motif of the Lover and the Beloved has a primary reference in the Song of Songs, which, in the thirteenth century, was widely interpreted as a love song between Christ (the lover) and the human soul (the beloved), but equally as a love song between Christ and the Blessed Virgin, the latter being a type of the soul in its heavenly state (see, for example, Fulton 2002, 244-350). The verse, «Quae est ista qui progreditur quasi aurora consurgens?», was thus applied both to the Blessed Virgin and to the soul as Christ's bride. In «Amic e Amat» 26, the rendering of the Dawn both as identical with the Lover (the soul) and as the space in which he dies, corresponds to the typological relationship which I argue exists between the Dawn and the Blessed Virgin in the *Llibre de sancta Maria*.



seems to me to be a key to the whole work. It is the passage which deals directly with the Annunciation and the conception of Christ. In Chapter 2, on Greatness, Praise considers the unity of the Holy Spirit, and continues:

Aquest Sant Esperit ab sa granea engraní la bontat e la granea e les altres parts de que es nostra Dona en esser una fembra qui sia mare de Deu tan solament. Per aquest Sant Esperit fo aumbrada nostra Dona com fo feta mare de Deu, e lo Sant Esperit ab tot sí meteix e ab tota sa granea aombrà la bontat la granea e les altres de nostra Dona, e açò en tant que l aumbració responés a la clarificació de la santedat del Sant Esperit, prenent lo Fill de Deu un cors humà de nostra Dona.<sup>54</sup>

This seems to say that, even though Our Lady was elevated to be the Mother of God by being given the noble Principles to an exceptional degree, this still did not make her affinity with God sufficiently great that the Incarnation could come about, as it were, naturally. It was necessary for the Holy Spirit to increase the greatness, goodness, etc. of which the Blessed Virgin is composed, in order for her to conceive the Son of God. From the chapter on Virtue, we have already seen a similar increase in natural qualities—in that case, virginity—for the sake of the Incarnation and divine motherhood.

In Llull's thought, as we have seen, the being of creation is, in a certain sense, continuous with that of its Creator. The being of creation is not merely analogous to that of God: when we speak of the being of God and the being of creation, we use the term *being* univocally.<sup>55</sup> Yet the *Llibre* shows us that the distinction between the infinite Creator and his creatures is absolute, at least in the sense that it cannot be crossed by any action other than an action of God himself. Moreover, God's crossing over into the creation transforms it by drawing out a capacity for divinisation which in turn cannot be realised by anyone other than God. That is to say, in order to be the Mother of God, the Blessed Virgin is raised to a Godlike condition which only God can accomplish in her. Likewise, the reader's initiation into an understanding of God's providence and mercy is accomplished finally by God himself.

The relationship between God and creation, then, has a correspondence in the understanding of the human mind. Llull famously has great confidence in the power of human reason to understand the mysteries of the Christian faith, refusing to mark any sharp division between faith and reason. This is the intellectual basis of his confidence that the Art will have the power to win Muslims over to Christianity. Yet Llull's notion of reason is very different from that of, say, Thomas

<sup>54</sup> *LSMCat* 2,4, 25-26.

<sup>55</sup> See fn. 17.

Aquinas.<sup>56</sup> For Llull, reason works only by being infused with an awareness of God's presence in all things: the only proper reasoning is spiritual, in the sense that it is orientated always to the sacred. Just as the world is constituted as a hierarchical descent, or radiation, from God, so human understanding must recognise the sacred nature of the creation, and use this recognition to ascend to knowledge of its creator. Llull himself employs the concept of the «transcendent point», which is the «instrument of human understanding» by which one rises to understand things that are beyond one's own powers, such as the fact that, in God, the Principles are one and the same.<sup>57</sup> This transcendence of ordinary human powers of intellect seems to be analogous to the transcendent state of physical and moral excellence which God accomplishes in the Blessed Virgin, and is the state which the *Llibre's* attentive reader should attain in her spiritual faculties.

In the light of this consideration, the account given above of Llull's pedagogy needs to be qualified. For if the reader comes to knowledge of the truth «intuitively», then this will not be a simply human process; rather, the book's technique of instruction will enable the reader's mind to be enlightened by God. It is God who will bring the daylight of knowledge and mercy to the human soul, just as it was the Holy Spirit who raised the Blessed Virgin Mary to conceive God incarnate. And this daylight appears at the Dawn, which might itself be viewed as a kind of transcendent point by which one passes from darkness to light.

Dawn, according to Praise, is the end of shadows and the beginning of splendour,<sup>58</sup> and the Dawn is the Blessed Virgin.<sup>59</sup> The night of human sinners meets the daylight of Christ,<sup>60</sup> as God the Son took human flesh in the Blessed Virgin's womb. If we look back to the *Llibre's* account of the Annunciation from the chapter on Greatness (pp. 22-23. above), we see that «the overshadowing [of the Holy Spirit] corresponds to the enlightenment of the Spirit's holiness, as the Son of God takes a human body from Our Lady». The meeting of night and day at Dawn thus recalls the overshadowing and illumination of the Incarnation. It is as though the Holy Spirit, by enhancing the Principles in Mary, has made her the place where the meeting of God and humanity can take place. She thereby becomes the Dawn who can cast the brilliance of the Son of God upon the benighted human soul. It may be worth bearing in mind here that the Catalan

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<sup>56</sup> The comparison is made in Hames (2000, 191-192).

<sup>57</sup> Bonner & Ripoll (2002, 257).

<sup>58</sup> *LSMCat*, 30,1, 222.

<sup>59</sup> *LSMCat*, 30,2, 222.

<sup>60</sup> *LSMCat*, 30,9, 226.

verb «to be born», *néixer*—used frequently in this work to refer to Christ's birth from his mother—can also be used to refer to the rising of the sun. Conversely, the Latin verb *orior*, which often refers to the rising of the sun, is used in the Latin version of the *Llibre* to translate the Catalan *néixer*. Perhaps sunrise and birth have a more or less «natural» affinity with one another, and it is this which Llull is playing on at a deep level.<sup>61</sup>

The cryptic clue to understanding the meaning of the Dawn is given in the second of the chapter's two narrative tales, which is told by Intention as a response to Prayer's further petitions that the light of day might illumine a benighted humanity,<sup>62</sup> followed by the Hermit's asking whether, since so many people dwell in shadows, Our Lady is indeed the dawn for sinners.<sup>63</sup> The story runs as follows:

There was a man who climbed a mountain in order to do penance for his sins, and at the end of each night, he would watch the spreading dawn, and would think of death, remembering that it is the dawn for those who are righteous and will pass on to eternal splendour. One day, a band of men came and seized him, and threw him into a dark jail. Now, the jail was in a castle where it was the custom to sound a horn at daybreak. So when the man heard the horn being blown, he would know that it was dawn, and was consoled by the thought that death was the entry to eternal day. One day, however, while the man was kneeling, and rejoicing at the sounding of the dawn, a serpent got into the man's cell, and it crept up and wound itself around the man's neck. The man wept for his sins and felt fear of the justice of God, but, precisely because he did these things, he remembered the mercy of Our Lady.<sup>64</sup>

This story is the culmination of the whole of the *Llibre*: it is the book's revelation—the moment of the attentive reader's full initiation.

First, then, we must note that it is a story about a man who is acting according to the right ordering of his intentions. He is sorry for his sins, and he is in the habit of remembering, and rejoicing in, the possibility of eternal life. This habit stands him in good stead, since it enables him to remember Our Lady's mercy even at the point of most fearing the justice of God. From this point of view, the story does not offer much of a response to Prayer's repeated demands that the many people who live in the darkness of sin should be converted to the light of Christ. From another point of view, however, this story may be seen as

<sup>61</sup> It may be worth noting that, in Romance languages, it is common to use the expression *giving* (to) *light* to mean 'giving birth', e.g., the Catalan *donar a llum*.

<sup>62</sup> *LSMCat*, 30,7-9, 225-227.

<sup>63</sup> *LSMCat*, 30,10, 227.

<sup>64</sup> *LSMCat*, 30,11, 227.

being concerned primarily with what happens to us at the point of death. In several of Llull's works, the recognition of one's mortality is the moment at which one seeks truth and conversion.<sup>65</sup> And this, I think, provides the key to the response to Prayer's complaint. For the world is indeed filled with people who are profane and godless, but every one of them will have to face death, and this serves as a kind of guarantee that all of them will repent, if only at the last.

The reason why the knowledge of death has this effect upon the soul is that the death of the body presents the soul with the knowledge of its own potential mortality. The serpent is Christianity's classic symbol of the Devil, who might rightly claim the soul of an unrepentant sinner. So when the hermit is threatened with death by a serpent, the threat is that of death to the soul, as well as the body: it is the threat of everlasting damnation. Yet the *Llibre* has taught us that God's justice is closely allied to his mercy, and we have been given good reason to suppose that punishment will not be God's final act in respect of even the hardened sinner. Moreover, long before the thirteenth century, the practice was well established of associating the Blessed Virgin with the defeat of the Devil in the form of a serpent. In Genesis 3, as Adam and Eve are cast out of Eden, God speaks words of condemnation to the serpent, which, since at least the fourth century, have been interpreted as containing a prophecy of Christ's conquest over evil. In Genesis 3:15, God says, in the Latin of the Vulgate translation, «Inimicitias ponam inter te et mulierem, et semen tuum et semen illius: ipsa conteret caput tuum, et tu insidiaberis calcaneo eius»: «I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and hers. She will crush your head, and you will lie in wait for her heel». The woman has commonly been understood to be the Blessed Virgin Mary (of whom Eve is the antitype), and her seed as Jesus Christ. The serpent has brought about humanity's downfall, but, by the Incarnation, Christ and his mother crush the serpent's head, which is to say that they overcome the rule of Satan, who is Eden's serpent. This interpretation of the Genesis text became a standard part of ordinary Catholic devotion, whilst the image of the Blessed Virgin standing on the head of the serpent became increasingly widespread in devotional art during the later Middle Ages. So the reader of the *Llibre de santa Maria*, on reading of the serpent's assault, would almost certainly have expected the Blessed Virgin to intervene to rescue the dying hermit. And this—at last, after thirty chapters—is what she finally does. Prayer's prayers are answered.

The question as to why the wicked are allowed to continue in their godlessness in the present life is not directly answered, and, from a purely intellectual

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<sup>65</sup> E.g., OE I, 1057. See also fn. 51, above.



point of view, the knowledge that they will be converted at the moment of death does not seem satisfactory. If, however, the reader has had her whole vision of the world transformed—if, by means of a transcendent point, she has been raised to a place in which she is beginning to understand things with a true eye of faith—then the knowledge of the unity of God's justice and Our Lady's mercy will be sufficient. The fact that the wicked are not converted is always a matter for sorrow, and their conversion should be the object of one's prayers; but what matters most is what is learnt in the final chapter, on Dawn. The reader understands that, however wayward humanity may be, all people will eventually come to seek God's mercy. Everyone must become aware of his or her mortality, and thus feel the grip of the serpent who threatens everlasting death. But in that terrible night of human sin, we will repent and be brought to remember the merciful Dawn of the Blessed Virgin, and in her, we will encounter the light of Christ's day.

## Abbreviations

- LSMCat* Ramon Lull, *Libre de Sancta Maria*, Salvador Galmés (ed.), ORL, 1915, pp. 2-228.
- LSMLat* «Liber de Sancta Maria», Blanca Garí and Fernando Domínguez Reboiras (eds.), ROL XXVII, 2003, pp. 39-241.

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### Key Words

Blessed Virgin, incarnation, initiation.

### Paraules clau

Mare de Déu, encarnació, iniciació.

### Abstract

The *Llibre de santa Maria* (1290) is an accomplished work of spiritual formation. One of the book's central concerns is the question of why there are people in the world who remain godless and wilfully sinful. Why does the Blessed Virgin not ask her son to convert them? A solution to this question is finally given in the last chapter, on the *Dawn*. However, the solution will be satisfactory only to the reader who has undergone the spiritual initiation that is the goal of the whole work—an initiation realised in an exemplary manner in the Blessed Virgin's conception of Christ. She is both the exemplary initiate and is identified with the «space» (the Dawn) in which the initiation takes place.

### Resum

El *Llibre de santa Maria* (1290) és una obra reeixida de formació espiritual. Un dels motius centrals del llibre és la qüestió de perquè en hi ha gent al món que es manté al marge de Déu i roman voluntàriament en el pecat. Com és que la Mare de Déu no demana al seu fill que els converteixi? La solució al problema es dona en darrer terme al capítol final sobre l'*Alba*. En tot cas, la solució serà satisfactòria només per al lector que hagi superat la iniciació espiritual que constitueix l'objectiu central de l'obra: una iniciació que es du a terme d'una manera exemplar en la concepció de Crist de la Verge Maria. La Mare de Déu és el model de la iniciació i també es pot identificar amb l'«espai» (l'*Alba*) en què la iniciació es duu a terme.